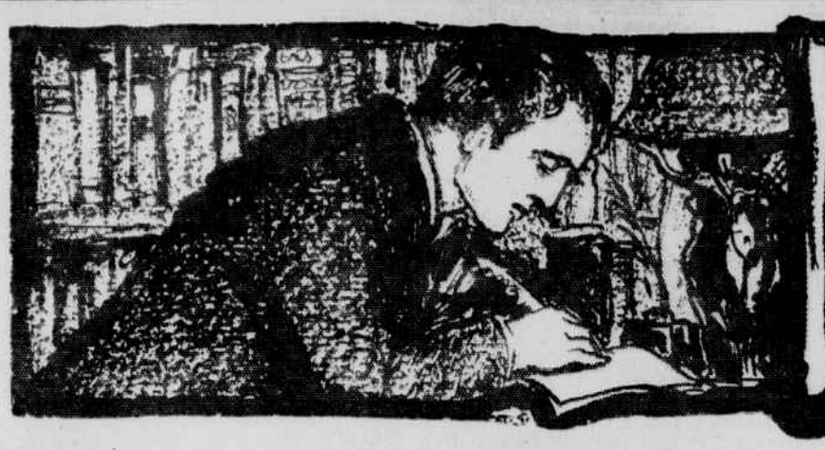


BOOKS

REVIEWS OF RECENT PUBLICATIONS WITH NEWS AND VIEWS OF AUTHORS

D'Annunzio Reappears

Poet's Latest Book Written in Hospital

NO book has been awaited in recent years by the Italians with such curiosity as "The Nocturne," by Gabrielle d'Annunzio, which has just been issued in Rome. For five years, with the exception of many prose compositions of a polemical and political character on the war, the peace, the policies of the Powers and Italy, nothing of a literary character has appeared from the pen of the leading Italian poet and prose writer. These effusions, while in his always splendid style, were intended, as he stated in them, as propaganda and justification for his various actions. His last book, "Leda Without the Swan," was published in 1916, but its character appears to have been overwhelmed by the war, as was its interest to the public. In reality the warrior first, and afterward the rebel, had excluded at first sight D'Annunzio from his real role as litterateur. That this was not actually the case is seen from the history of "Nocturne," the larger portion of which was written through those dreadful months when he was tied a prisoner to his bed with the possibility of completely losing his eyesight.

"The Nocturne" is not, therefore, a post war book, the renewal of his active literary life after the violences of war. Its conception and scheme were contemporary with the battles, and it is built on them and draws its life blood from them. The book, to quote a phrase of D'Annunzio's referring to his companions who came to his bedside to bring him notices of the progress of events, "smells of battle as a butcher does of blood and a harvester of hay."

Wounded as the result of an aviation incident during the war (1916), he ran the risk of losing his eyesight completely, and to avoid this he was ordered to lie immovable and in complete darkness. "I have the eyes bandaged. I am flat in bed, with my back immovable, with my head a little lower than my feet. I raise slightly the knees to incline the board which is placed there. I write on a narrow slip of paper with raised lines. I have between the fingers a pencil. The thumb and middle finger of the right hand, resting on the line of the sheet makes it run along as the words are written. I feel with the flange of the little finger the line underneath and this acts for me as a guide to keep the direction. The elbows are held firm against my flanks. I try to give the movement of my hands an extreme lightness in order that their play shall not go beyond the pulse, that no shudder may reach the bandaged head. I feel in my attitude the rigidity of an Egyptian scribe carved in basalt. The room is free from any light. I write in the darkness. I trace my signs in the night, which is solid against my ribs like a nailed board." In this manner was this extraordinary book written. Homer and Milton were blind, but surely this is the first time that a book has been written under such conditions.

"Aegri Somnia" he places on the first page of the book, and that is the book's justification and its intimate spirit. It explains the disorganized character of the work, which will be found especially noticeable in the arbitrary manner in which the episodes are arranged. From page to page the reader flits as in dreams. Bizarre, mad conceptions pass by so rapidly and with so little obvious conjunction that it would seem that they were aerial, with no existence in conscience and without any apparent reason for being recorded. There is only one central idea and that so vague and indefinite, but it is to be found in every episode, the brain of the sick man, constructing with almost diabolical swiftness, a pictorial structure, which disappears, to reappear again in another form, which in its turn crumbles to pieces, and out of this mass of ruins there hardly appears any splendid æsthetic figure but in the rare delicacy of the prose and its inimitable fineness there is to the reader a disharmony and an obsession which forms the contrast.

The book was commenced in 1916 and a large portion of it was written before April of that year. Ten thousand slips of paper were covered by the author and he compares the slips to the sheets of the Sibilla on which short phrases were written, afterward to be carried away by the wind. His daughter, Renata, who was his devoted nurse, undertook the work of deciphering these sheets, no easy task considering the conditions under which they were written and that the writing graduated according to the sufferings of the writer, and in many cases when he was passing through the worst days lines were superimposed one on top of another. He records with anguish the interruptions which disturbed the trend of the visions, and once the vision was gone it could not be recalled, for a new vision was already in its place urging to be attended to. Many of the sheets were not numbered and infinite care had to be taken to get them in proper order for the deciphering of the whole. Other sheets, especially of parts which particularly appealed to him, as the vision of his mother's face, he handed to his nurse and amanuensis to be carefully hidden and not shown to any one. The book is dedicated to his mother, and the picture of his old home near Pescara and his mother's care for him and her tenderness to see that the fire was alight all night are infinitely touching and will compare with the best pages that the poet has ever written.

Some of the descriptions of incidents of the war are stupendous. In his delirium these events through which he passed were conjured up again within his bandaged eyes. A great raid was to be carried out on the Dalmatian coast. The night before his pilot in a trial flight crashed into the sea and was drowned. D'Annunzio, who was saved, watched his body throughout the night. He describes all the little details of the placing of the body in the coffin, the journey across the lagoon to the island of the dead and the final burial . . . all this with infinite grace. Another night when sleep would not come to him he feels the bed rocking like the double wings of an airplane between sky and water. To get a whiff of the fresh air of the Adriatic he opens his mouth, but no relief comes. At the end of the bed without his mask and pilot's cap he sees the face of his pilot, Alfredo Barbieri, and there follows the picture of the raid on Lubiana, in which D'Annunzio was to have taken part, but at the last minute was substituted by another. Barbieri was killed with the pilot. "Time after time, all the passions of all the times sweep across my bandaged eyes, innumerable like the hot sand through the clinched fist. But I recognize them. Are not these the mad days of May, of the evening at the Capitol? Forms flitting, shrieking . . ."

All the visions of his past life pass before those eyes; the music of Beethoven, Frescobaldi, Scriabine. Paris records, and remembrances of his exile on the Atlantic coast near Carcachon. A flower culled by the Cathedral of Pisa, a night ride in the desert near Cairo, a torpedo boat raid under Piero Orsini and a visit to the Morosini Isle with its big naval guns. One of the finest phantasms is that of holy week. "It is holy Friday, it is the birthday of Rome. All those who are dead in battle, all have given their lives as the price of the world. All those who work and worry to feed the battle, all give their pains as the price of the world. All those who take their share, fight and die in this most just war, all share and fight and die for the price of the world." But convalescence has begun, and the work was completed for what little remained later.

This history of the writing of the book is not to be found as might be expected at the beginning of the book, but is placed at the end. The contents are divided into two parts which are called by the author "Offerings."

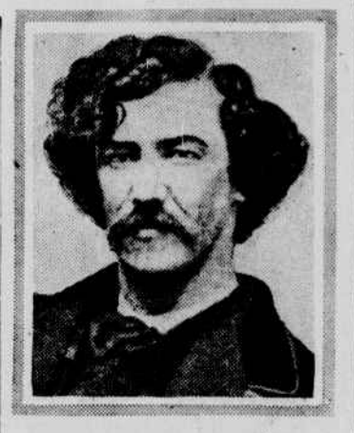
J. A. SINCLAIR POOLEY.

Pennell Tells How Artists' Ignorance Held Up Work on Liberty Loan Posters

THE GRAPHIC ARTS. Modern Men and Modern Methods. By Joseph Pennell. Illustrated. University of Chicago Press.

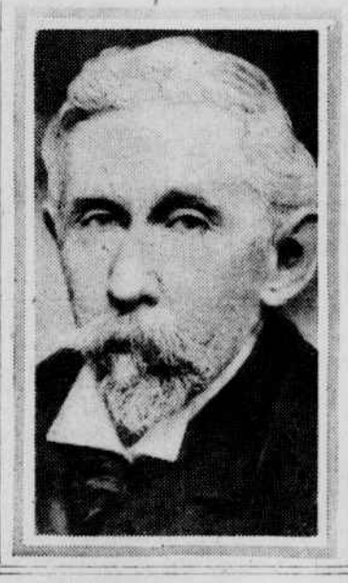
THE WHISTLER JOURNAL. By E. R. and J. Pennell, authors of the Authorized Life of James McN. Whistler. Illustrated. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company

WHEN the American Academy of Arts and Letters elected Joe Pennell a member it got more arts and letters than usually come in one bundle. And as if to demonstrate the fact the two books listed above were issued at about the same time. The partnership of Mrs. Pennell in the second is a happy illustration of a kind of picture-and-text comradeship which has been not uncommon in America, to mention only the Blashfields and Walter and Louise Hale. Readers of the old *Century* will remember the armchair travels through a less known Europe they used to delight in with Elizabeth and Joseph.



James McNeil Whistler.

These two books mingle glowing reminiscences of giants with a guidance in craftsmanship that should be of use to sincere artists of the future, even if they are only little giants. The lectures that make up "The Graphic Arts" were delivered at the Art Institute of Chicago on the Scammon Foundation. They were reported in shorthand. "If, therefore," explains Mr. Pennell, "the book seems to be talked instead of written, it is what I want, what I have said, what I have learned, what I believe. . . . It is myself. And though talked in six hours, it has taken sixty years to get together." There is plenty of wisdom here, of the kind that can be got only by experience. And Pennell is right in emphazing the need for more attention to such training to meet world competition:



Joseph Pennell.

"We are going to have to fight in the immediate future not only our enemies but our allies, and they are trained craftsmen, and unless we are prepared to take up nationally the teaching of the graphic arts and the applied arts and the industrial arts our enemies and our friends are going to do our art work for us."

He illustrates the shameful result in a great crisis of the lack of such training. Even the people who consider art something a nation can take or leave must see the force of this:

"Those colored posters that you have seen, the war posters that were issued for Liberty Loans, were nearly every one of them—I think all of them—done in lithography, but they were nearly all of them done by men and women who did not know anything about lithography. And the drawings were mostly made not in lithographic chalk but as water colors or oil paintings, and when they had been so made the originals had to be photographed onto sheets of zinc or stone or redrawn on the zinc or stone by a trained craftsman in lithography. . . .

"About five of the five hundred artists who made war posters understood lithography, and the other four hundred and ninety-five did not. The consequence was that the four hundred and ninety-five posters had to be redrawn, and this not only delayed the United States Liberty Loans but it cost the United States Government an enormous sum of money for unnecessary time and labor.

"And every artist whose work was copied and redrawn also was disappointed. He knew nothing about the art, and most of the so-called lithographic artists knew nothing about design, and the result was that in every case the drawings were changed and lost in character, excepting those of the half dozen men who did know."

Of course it is a pity that so much of Pennell's writing should be marred by scolding. Even if his never ending indictment of our day were all true it is irrelevant or at least he could get the poison out of his system by one good page of damns and be done with it. But never mind. His ore is full of gold. We must forgive the bad temper, just as we overlook his slighting of other men when his hero comes in question.

The "Whistler Journal" is rich in every kind of value. It is no retelling of the "Life." Its very informality charms the reader. Here is a unique word picture of Whistler in 1884:

"At this period, and during the greater part of his life, when he was in the studio at work, Whistler looked not unlike an old fashioned American barkeeper because he wore a white waistcoat with sleeves which all barkeepers used to wear, and also because he had the thick curly hair which many of them cultivated. They juggled with glasses, a lost art."

But this is not a mere record of externals. Here is Whistler, the honest worker, always learning:

"But he knew Whistler preferred to hear the truth, would rather have you say what you thought than get off the usual commonplaces. Some years ago, in Whistler's studio with Lavery, Whistler showed them a portrait he was doing and asked their opinion. Walton started to criticise, but Lavery interrupted, 'Oh! Mr. Whistler, we would not venture to criticise your work!' Whistler, however, paid no attention to Lavery, but made Walton say what he had begun to say, and then argued it out with him, just as any other artist would have done. We know for ourselves how little Whistler liked the 'O Great Master!' attitude—the 'O splendid! O wonderful!'"

There is new matter about the Ruskin row with Whistler. It doesn't seem very important. This paragraph throws light on Mrs. Ruskin's final preference for Millais:

"Ruskin, Sandys said, treated Lady Millais when she was Mrs. Ruskin abominably. He was not brutal, he never reproved her. But he kept a diary, and every Monday morning he had her up before him and read her a list of all her misdemeanors for every day in the past week."

The book is full of good stories about all sorts of famous people. Here comes in the author of "Sartor Resartus":

"He later told the story of Carlyle and the painting of the portrait more completely than before—that is, to us. 'There were ladies in Chelsea—well—Mme. Venturi, who was determined that I should paint it. I used to go often to Mme. Venturi's. I met Mazzini there, and Mazzini was most charming. Mme. Venturi often visited me, and one day she brought Carlyle. The *Mother* was there, and Carlyle saw it and seemed to feel in it a certain fitness of things, as Mme. Venturi meant he should. He liked the simplicity of it, the old lady sitting with her hands in her lap, and he said he would be painted. And he came one morning soon, and he sat down, and I had the canvas ready and my brushes and palette, and Carlyle said: And now, mon, fire away. That wasn't my idea of how work should be done, and Carlyle realized it, for he added: If ye're fighting battles or painting pictures, the only thing to do is to fire away. One day he told me of others who had painted his portrait. There was Mr. Watts, a mon of note. And I went to his studio, and there was much meestification, and screens were drawn round the easel, and curtains were drawn, and I was not allowed to see anything. And then at last the screens were put aside and there I was. And I looked. Mr. Watts, a great mon, he said to me: How do you like it? And I turned to Mr. Watts, and I said: Mon, I would have ye know I am in the habit of wuring clean lunen. But Carlyle agreed that I had given him clean linen, and he liked the portrait—he told people afterward that he had been there, talking and talking, and that I had just gone on with my work, and had paid no attention to him whatever."

Both volumes are full of good pictures. But the text alone more than justifies them.

Needless Fear Of Fairy Tales

HERE AND NOW STORY BOOK. By Lucy Sprague Mitchell. Experimental stories written for the children from 2 to 7 years old of the City and Country School of the Bureau of Educational Experiments. Illustrated by Hendrik Van Loon. E. P. Dutton & Co.

MRS. MITCHELL has largely succeeded. She has made a new and beautiful contribution to children's literature. But that is only half of her attempt. The stories illustrate a theory following the path of modern psychology, not that of past generations of educators. Briefly the thesis is: Build a child's stories around the things of the child's immediate life, which are the only things he can understand, and so ground him in realities before taking him into the confusing realm of the unknown.

I approached this sceptically. Was this but another attempt to make scientists of us all, to make children hate books by feeding them dull, didactic reading? Mrs. Mitchell has happily escaped these pitfalls by the catholicity of the subject matter and by the charm of the presentation.

To make realities more interesting than dreams is the task Floyd Dell assigned to education. Mrs. Mitchell achieves this, notably in one of the stories for six and seven year olds. "Boris Walks Every Way in New York" is as exciting and adventurous as "Jack and the Beanstalk!" Boris, a little boy from Russia, wants to see grass. No, not just park grass, but lots and lots of grass. So Boris explores. He walks west, and comes to a river. He walks east, and comes to a river. The next day he sets out anew. He walks north and comes to a river, and he walks south and comes to the end of the land again! Here there are boats and docks and East River bridges and Hudson River tubes, and Manhattan is an island! And beyond the water surrounding it is the wide, green country!

There is the wonder and the joy of discovery here, told in an adventuring style, which takes it out of the class of informational writing. Any child would be just as anxious to emulate Boris as he is to sail the unknown seas following Columbus or to adventure with Stevenson and Pyle.

"The Children's New Dresses" tells of a complicated industrial process and interdependent relationships in the style of the earlier cumulative tales. "The Old Lady and the Pig," which hails from—Babylon, is it? "Hammer, Saw and Plane" is but a smaller and more obvious "Robinson Crusoe." "The Little Hen and the Rooster" is a valuable variation of the surviving Nursery Rhymes. Rooting these stories in the past is not an attempt to disparage them. Rather it takes their author out of the class of faddists who are incapable of eclecticism.

In fact, with Mrs. Mitchell's positive selections there is little quarrel. It is with the things she counsels omitting that I would question her. Non-existent things, such as fairies and the changes they effect contrary to physical law, are banned because they confuse a child who is not yet acquainted with the scientific bases and relationships of his immediate contacts, Mrs. Mitchell contends, speaking particularly of the child under eight. This

on page 33.

"I have never found that six-year-old children did not readily discriminate the actual from the imaginary." This

on page 325.

The origin of this apparent contradiction is really the failure to realize the double faculty of the child mind which makes for a love and understanding of the mysterious and the actual in great detail, and the imaginative and literal interpretation of them. Robert Louis Stevenson tells this well in his essay "Child's Play," which is also a charming exposition of the child's way of thinking through his muscles and by motion rather than with his mind by thought.

Because I believe that the statement on page 325 is essentially sound I am impatient with this everlasting fear of the "moderns" of confusing the child. They are always talking of protecting him, of appealing to the "little dear" in stories written for him. Isn't Mrs. Mitchell negating part of her thesis in thus keeping from the child harshnesses that do come within the lives of all of us? Isn't she encouraging romanticism when she wants to encourage clear, courageous thinking? Are there many children, even under seven, who are not saddened and confused by the death of a pet or parent, who are not duped or bullied, who are not the victims of the causes of economic inequality?

But let Mrs. Mitchell continue to write for children; for all her preoccupation with science she does it *con amore*. And in so far as she is interesting them in a world outside of themselves she has done well. But she must not deny the child fairyland—if for no other purpose than for comparison. For there are realities—the evidences of evolution, the ecstasies of love—more wonderful than the creations of the wildest and most elastic imaginations if we only have the courage to learn and let learn.

EMILY Z. FRIEDKIN.

"Nietzsche or Schopenhauer?" Thundered Huneker

VARIATIONS. By James Huneker. Charles Scribner's Sons.

A Personal Tribute and a Review, By BENJAMIN DE CASSERES.

I LOOK on my friendship—both actual and epistolary—of twenty years with James Huneker as one of my most precious and inspiring possessions. It was he who pronounced for me "Open Sesame!" before the golden gates of European literature and art. I have never been on the Continent of Europe—except mentally. It was James Huneker in the opening years of this century who was both Cook and Baedeker to me.

Then there were his electric, dynamic style, his ecstatic enthusiasm before the men he loved, his carousing, tolerant and vivid personality, his scholarship—often obscured by his incandescent brilliancy—the perfect union of heart and head, his aristocratic democracy, his insatiable pursuit of variation, his swift and acute evaluations of men and their product—all these came with terrific impact on myself and the rising generation of Americans at a time when we were crying for a Moses to lead us out of the house of the slavery of provincialism.

Although we were both on the same paper—the old morning Sun—at the time he became dramatic editor—succeeding, I believe, Franklin Fyles—we did not meet. He seldom came to the office. But on the appearance of his first Sunday article—on D'Annunzio and Duse—the latter at that time appearing in "La Citta Morta," "La Gioconda" and other plays of the great Italian poet at the Metropolitan Opera House—I struck up a correspondence with him.

"Here is the American I have been looking for," I said to myself. "Here is the man who will lay the House of Smug in ruins—the American who lays about him with a jewelled club." I think my first letter to him began with "Ecce Homo!"—at which the brain of Jim Huneker must have smiled a grin. His sense of humor was half of his genius.

Then began an intermittent correspondence of about three years before I ever laid eyes on the greatest literary magician that this country has yet produced.

I first saw him at the old Garden Theatre, at an opening performance of one of Zangwill's plays—the name of which now escapes me. I could not get to him between the acts.

But the great day—or night—came a few years later. It was in "Jack's" restaurant one Saturday night—and those old Saturday nights in "Jack's" were things ever to be remembered. It was about 1 o'clock Sunday morning. I was deep in my third or fourth seidel of Pilsner—a beverage that was to Jim the elixir of Hesperus—when in blew Huneker from Sixth avenue, leading a crowd made up of "Billy" Glackens, George Luks, Ernest Lawson, Ferdinand Sinzig and Frederick James Gregg.

Huneker had on a flaring red tie, a perfectly fitting gray tailormade suit, and the radiance of his face—Olympian and Aristophanic—dimmed the incandescents.

After he had got seated I went over and announced myself.

"Nietzsche or Schopenhauer?" he thundered at me. That was his greeting and the first words he ever spoke to me. It was typical of the man. My health, the weather, what was I doing—these were of no consequence. Had I deserted the "Book of Ecclesiastes" for "Thus Spake Zarathustra"? That's all he needed to know at that moment. I do not remember my answer. It could not have been very enlightening, anyhow, for he shoved me into a seat at the table without listening to me, ordered for me "a couple of seidels" and took from my lap the book I had with me. It was a collection of essays by Lafcadio Hearn. He glanced at the title, and laid it back in my lap with the comment:

"Hearn—impressionist—fine style—no stuffing."

One by one the others left, and Huneker and I were left alone. We discussed, debated and wrangled over Hearn, Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Amiel, Whitman, Haeckel, Darwin, Swinburne, Anatole France, D'Annunzio, Huysmans, Marie Bashkirtseff, Roosevelt, Philadelphia, Duse, Emerson, Max Stirner, William Penn and heaven knows what until 7 o'clock in the morning. We then both bowed our heads in slumber on the table—which was quite the vogue in those days in "Jack's" at 7 o'clock Sunday morning.

From that time on I saw him quite a great deal and corresponded with him almost up to the day of his final sleep. When he went to Europe he would send me a postal from every town he visited. He always came back with an inexhaustible store of anecdote. He seemed to have the eyes of a fly—and a brain that was a camera.

The last time I saw Huneker was about a month before his death. He was coming out of the Metropolitan Opera House. He looked tired and bored, as indeed he was. We went to a bar, where we drank near beer. His remarks about prohibition were all that a free born American's should be—although quite quite unprintable.

All of James Huneker's work from "Mezzotints in Modern Music" to "Variations" is a variation on one theme—genius. Did ever a man—with the exception of Victor Hugo—ever glorify in such prose the one thing that justifies the existence of man on the planet—genius—as James Huneker's? Genius was to him the vestibule to the temple of the Mansion in the Skies. The productions of the great composers, writers, painters, poets and sculptors made for him a veritable fairyland. And with the magic of words he lifts all his readers bodily into that Never-Never Land. He knew more than any other man of his time the esoteric meaning of "And in the beginning was the Word"—without expression there can be no creation. The Word is the creational flat. There must always be an Annunciation. Music was the Eternal Beauty of Plato made manifest in sound; poetry was its epiphany in words; paint its efflorescence in color. His valuations were instantaneous—immediate reactions of his exquisite sensibility to eternals. He was the arch enemy of the academic, of the platitudinous, of the sentimental, of lipstick English.

He possessed that rarest of gifts among writers—ecstasy. From his pen there came a frenzy—a frenzy of joy in his work that was pagan. He thought and felt dithyrambically. He hurled his seed and forgot the harvest—going on to new fields. To me, Huneker, physically as well as artistically, seemed to leave a trail of unearthly light behind him.

And withal he was the most modest of men—a man who always seemed somewhat ashamed of his greatness. Or did he wear that mask of clownishness that Nietzsche told every great man to don when he went among the swineherds and long ears? I put it as a question through sheer politeness—for I know what I know.

Huneker loved human nature with the same passion as Walt Whitman. I have stood for hours with him while he talked to bartenders, cabbies, policemen, gamblers and porters. He was curious of everything that God had created. "Optimism" and "pessimism" were to him obsolete words. Life was good because it was an adventure. Good and evil were also mere words to Huneker. Experience was Grace. In one of his last letters to me he said happiness was a snare—no man could be happy and create. He was Rabelaisian. Heinesque—and as gentle as a woman. In a word, the most extraordinary man—with Poe and Whitman—that America has produced, and in his field their equal.

Szukalski, the sculptor, says that criticism is a bird and a sword. The "criticism" of Huneker was just that—a bird and a sword. He flew while he destroyed. He builded and razed with the same hand. Francis Wilson put it beautifully in his speech over the corpse of Huneker at the Town Hall when he spoke of his "constructive condemnation"—referring to Huneker's work as dramatic critic. Huneker despised fake, sham, puff, camouflage, bunk—in fact he despised and satirized publicly and privately almost everything that makes up the America of to-day. But no man uttered louder or longer hosannas when an American did something real in art, letters, the drama or music.

Huneker was not attached to any school, movement or ism. He was Huneker first, last and all the time. "My truth is *the* truth," he has uttered, quoting Max Stirner. With the sublime effrontery of Goethe he took what he needed from other men and tossed it in the alembic of his own sensibility. He was—like Remy de Gourmont—not guilty of the vice of mediocre writers—of always being sincere. He was Latin—and when he felt like lying beautifully he did so. To him imagination and vision were truth—and they were all ye need to know.

The most astonishing thing about the work of James Huneker—and that which makes him unique in America—is that three-fourths of his greatest creative work was published in the newspapers. It is a great tribute to The New York Sun, the New York *Times* and the New York *World* that they allowed this great man full and untrammelled utterance. Huneker was always proud of his newspaper affiliations, and he always insisted that he was just a "newspaper man." No one could "swell" that perfectly balanced head!

"Variations" is a splendid introductory volume to the study of the sixteen other volumes of James Huneker. They all reveal his polyphonic and his polychromatic soul. The book consists of thirty-four essays on as widely varying subjects as George Moore and Roosevelt. Here is Huneker viewed from a thousand angles. Here is Huneker reproducing himself as he sees himself in a thousand mirrors in a thousand different costumes. Hold your breath as you go through this book—touring the universe with a man who takes all of life in its everlasting fecundity and efflorescence for his theme.

With the lightness of an intellectual Mordkin he capers, flits and pirouettes from Flaubert to Pennell, from alcohol to Chopin, from old prints to Browning, from socialism (which he despised as the triumph of mediocrity and vulgarity) to Faust, from Cosima Wagner to "Potterism," from Caruso to Buddha, from Nordau to Jack Haverly.

If you are tired of that deadly bromide called the "American essay" read "Variations," and then all the rest of James Gibbons Huneker—the American Columbus who discovered Europe.